

New Orleans

Spring Break 2006



*73 students from Hampshire College volunteered in New Orleans
for their Spring Break helping with Hurricane Katrina relief.*

This is what they saw.

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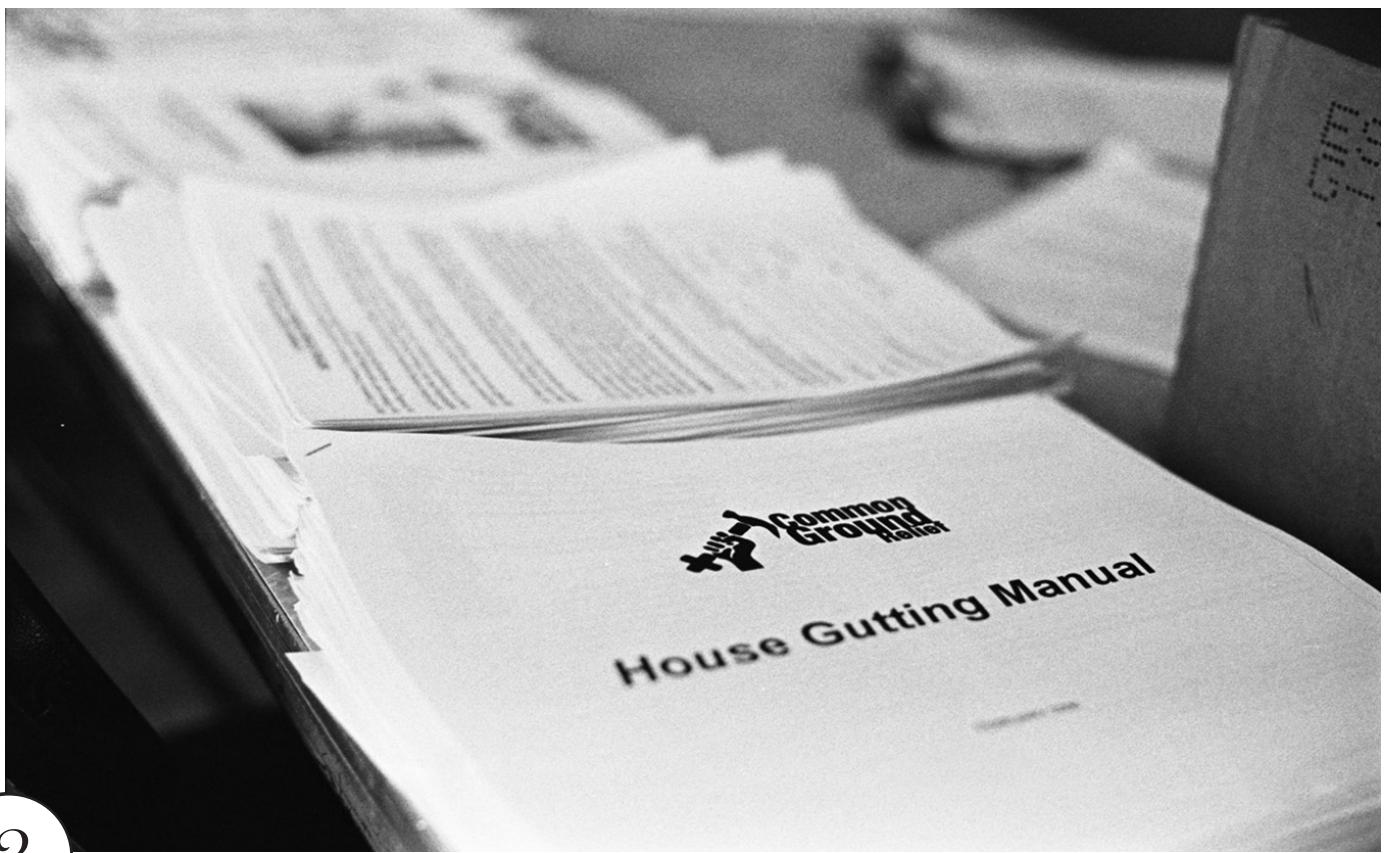
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Compiled & Edited by Molly McLeod and Jacob Lefton

Layout by Molly McLeod

Cover Photo by Tobin Porter-Brown



Editors' Notes

The trip to New Orleans is one I'll hopefully never forget. It was like walking through a dream land hoping that at some point I would wake up and the whole thing would turn out to be an alternate reality constructed by my unconscious mind. I don't understand how anyone can justify the amount of devastation still left in that city, seven months later.

The hurricane and problems resulting from it and such bad social conditions in this region and country have scarred the city and its denizens deeply. I tried to look at the Times-Picayune (the local paper) most of the days I was there. Some, easily half the articles were dealing with various fallout from the hurricane. There were articles about displaced students and families, debris removal, especially the cars, re-opening of schools, the amount of money spent on different areas, the amount of insurance various areas got compared to others, and displaced voters being able to vote in the city's primary elections, to name a few.

When I say a huge psychological impact on the city, I mean that all those articles I mentioned happened within a three day period, on the front pages of different sections of the papers. The hurricane happened seven months ago. There is obviously a daunting amount of work to be done to help the city of New Orleans heal and grow. I'm grateful for my opportunity to be there.

The tag line of Common Ground is "Solidarity, not Charity." They would say, "You're not here simply to be nice to these people. You're here to learn and grow and have an experience you can bring back to your community, too." This publication is one in a series of efforts we will be making to bring our experiences to the community of Hampshire College and the greater community of the Pioneer Valley. If you wish to be updated about future work that students will put together on this experience, please e-mail me at jwl04@hampshire.edu.

- Jacob Lofton



Even after seeing what was going on in New Orleans with my own eyes, it was still unbelievable. The Lower 9th Ward was like nothing I had ever seen in my life. There were houses turned 90 degrees and laying half caved in on their sides, there were houses on top of cars, there were some houses missing completely from where they should have been. It felt haunted, forgotten, abandoned for fifty years.

When I visited the French Quarter, I never saw such a contrast, I had a hard time believing I was in the same city. There were tons of street artists, tourists with goofy smiles posing for the camera, art galleries, gift shops, bars, and historical markers. It appeared to be alive and thriving. Had I been there first, I would have had no idea a hurricane had hit, except for the tasteless t-shirts hanging out of every other street shop, like "Katrina gave me a blow job I'll never forget!" Some people who are living in the nicer areas of the city don't even know what's going on in the Lower 9th.

However, for every shop or gallery I went into, the owner or worker would stop what they were doing and start telling me their story, some with tears in their eyes, and expressed their deep gratitude and love for all the volunteers who had come down to help.

While we were down there Hampshire students worked along side other volunteers from all over the country and the world gutting houses, working with women and children, community outreach informing residents of what resources are available to them, participating in peace rallys and sit-ins at St. Augustine's church (the first church to be run by freed slaves), bioremediation, and numerous other tasks. It was a physically and emotionally intense week for everyone.

If you have questions or comments about this publication, feel free to email me at mcm05@hampshire.edu.

- Molly McLeod

Thoughts On Volunteering

by Katie Richardson

OUR WEEK SPENT IN NEW ORLEANS was incredible, horrible and hopeful. The situation is dire, the destruction is truly baffling. It is obvious that there is racism and discrimination involved.

The 9th ward is a predominantly poor African American neighborhood, and this is where the damage is the worst. The largest break in the levee occurred alongside this community, leaving their homes in a pile of wreckage and toxic flood water. There are homes on top of cars, other homes, fences. Houses were lifted off their foundations and moved as far as a block away. The remnants of these lives can be seen dispersed as rubble throughout the area.

The largest break in the levee was actually caused by a 200 ft barge. This you don't hear on the news. A barge was left in the canal, directly alongside this community. Supposedly the water was high enough and the winds strong enough that the boat was literally lifted up and over the levee, bringing with it a 30-40 ft wave of destruction. The owner of the barge passes responsibility to those who rented it, who claim it was the responsibility of the towing company. The coast guard should have cleared the area before the hurricane hit. There is no accountability.

There are also many residents who believe the levee was intentionally blown up. This would not be unprecedented; the lower 9th was flooded in the past to save the French Quarter. These residents all claim they heard 3 large blasts. The break in the levee was 300 ft long and the barge only 200 ft. Whatever the truth is, it is clear that intense negligence is involved. Everyone has known that the levee couldn't withstand a level 4 or 5 hurricane. (It looks like a hill) But the hurricane was only a level 2 in New Orleans! Whether it was the barge, or intentionally blown up, it almost doesn't matter. The negligence is clear, and the result is the same.

One resident reported that she was still watching TV around 4 in the morning after the hurricane, there was still power and very little flooding. She let her dogs out for a walk, heard 3 loud blasts and the dogs came back in a panic. The water followed. By the time this woman could go across the street to wake her neighbor, the water was so high that they couldn't get out the door. They broke through the roof to escape.

Nearby white, middle class neighborhoods are quickly being rebuilt, and are buzzing with

contractors. The 9th ward is deserted. It is obvious that the state has no intention of rebuilding. In fact they are not even providing permits for houses to be gutted. (This is the work we were doing) Residents of the 9th ward, those who were rescued, were shut up in the superdome or the convention center for as long as a week with no food or water. They were flooded out, kicked out, criminalized and then rejected by communities where they sought refuge. Stories claim that buses leaving New Orleans were given food and water as they passed from town to town, but they were also met by riot police to make sure they didn't get off the bus. Apparently some weren't able to leave the bus for 48 hours. These residents are now residing in places from Baton Rouge to Alaska. They were not even allowed back into their own homes until approximately a month and a half ago. So basically we are seeing the criminalization of a community for being poor, black, and flooded out of their homes.

Our work was with Common Ground Relief, who is working on the ground, gutting houses so that residents can begin to move back, providing food and water, working with children, providing bikes, and working on whatever aspects the community wants help with. We were digging through the black mold covered remnants of people's homes, wearing tyvek suits, respirators, goggles, gloves and rubber boots. Not only was their floodwater, but it was highly toxic because it mixed with chemical and toxic waste. (definitely the rankest thing I've ever encountered) the initials TFW (toxic flood water) were sprayed on the front of almost every home, also the number of bodies found, and notes about animals dead or rescued. Imagine coming home and having to scrub the number of dead of your front door. Imagine entering your homes to find it looking like a moldy garbage dump. or if you were lucky enough to have someone else gut it, entering the frame of your home, everything ripped out to the studs.

19 schools are open in New Orleans right now, out of over 100 schools. The school system was already corrupt, but now the plans are to open only approx. 40 schools and offer the rest up for charter applications (which likely will reinforce the racism and discrimination) Martin Luther King (MLK) Elementary has been targeted by the community, they want this school opened. (it is scheduled for 2008) So Common Ground has been working with them, entering the school to clean up, and the school board just granted permission. Once the school is cleaned out, Common Ground can use it as a community space until they can prove that there are enough students to

open it again.

I was in MLK for a day, cleaning out a preschool classroom. It was so creepy. There was about an inch thick layer of toxic sludge on the floor. We are being required to inventory EVERY item in these classrooms so that the school can get money. So we were picking up crayons, toys, paper out of the mold and mud. They want things catalogued to the T, which is impossible and unproductive. We were peeling apart stacks of moldy books trying to locate the ISBN numbers. This is basically the state saying, 'we really dont want you to open this school, but if you want to do it, we are going to make it as hard as possible'. There are obviously more efficient ways to deal with this.

There is no doubt that this community could be largely functioning by now-6 months later. The nearby white communities are. We have the capacity. But not the will!?? The military has been interested in the land alongside the levee for years. And so are a lot of big corporations. They are hoping for a whitewash, or corporate land grabs. The government does not want these people to go home. Frankly, some of them don't want to go back either. After having their lives destroyed and being treated like shit, it's not surprising. But there are many who do want to come home, who want their community back. It is rooted in history, it has been their home for generations. So Common Ground is helping to get enough of these people back, so that they can start to take more charge of what needs to happen. It feels so overwhelming. We almost finished A house. ONE. (my work crew of 10 people). The streets are empty, it feels creepy because you know no one is home.

Even though its illegal to gut the houses, the federal government is picking up the trash, and the EPA is picking up the toxic chemicals from homes. Thousands of volunteers are down there making a big impact. A lot of privileged white students were there for spring break, which provides an amazing opportunity to work on breaking down racism, on both sides. These students, we, learned sooo much, and I know that the community down there is really grateful and impressed that people are noticing.

We can bridge these gaps of hate, racism, ignorance. The People's Institute is working with Common Ground to do anti-racism trainings. There are after school programs beginning, there are art projects, a women's center, a free media center. Volunteers are staying in schools, churches and tents, working hard all day every day to do everything possible. Documentation is happening, information is being slowly by slowly disseminated.

When people ask 'how was your break?', its a hard question to answer. It was awful, and painful, devastating and eye-opening, miserably sad. But it was also fun, amazing, beautiful and inspiring, because of the fabulous community of volunteers and residents, because of the hope and the effort, the dream that this will have a broader impact, or at minimum spare a community from the corruption and discrimination it is experiencing.

Point is, this is not ok. By any stretch of the imagination, there is blatant injustice happening. The news stopped reporting on it, so America has forgotten. We can do a lot of big talk about spreading 'democracy', but we can't take care of our own people. We aren't free. Priorities need to be evaluated. People need to get ANGRY.

Thanks so much to those of you who helped us all get down there. This is important work, and we appreciate the support. I hope this email gave you a little insight, a little information to spread, a little sadness, and a little hope. I don't have many pictures, and none of the area right next to the levee break, but here are a couple images. The chalkboard was in the room we were staying in on the 3rd floor of a school. My friend is pointing to the line where the water first settled (after the surge of water that was even higher) way above her head. The pile of rubble is in front of the house we were working on.

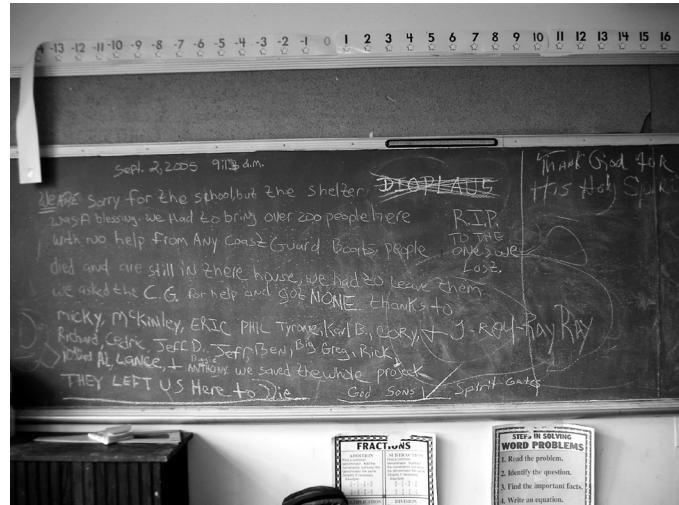
I'm told this is a good website for updates about New Orleans if anyone is interested.

<http://www.nola.com/>.

Solidarity, Peace
Love Katie ♡

New Orleans

• Photos by Katie Richardson •



Text on blackboard of classroom we slept in: "We are sorry for the school, but the shelter was a blessing. We had to bring over 200 people here with no help from any Coast Guard Boats, people died and are still in there house, we had to leave them. We asked the C.G. for help and got NONE. Thanks to Micky, McKinley, ERIC PHIL Tyrone, Karl B., Cory, + J-Roy - Ray Ray, Richard, Cedric, Jeff D. Jeff, Ben, Big Greg, Rick, 10th ward AL, Lance, + Anthony we saved the whole project. THEY LEFT US HERE to Die"

Dated Sept 2, 2005 9:13 AM



Albert's story

On Burgundy Street, New Orleans LA

Transcribed by Maya Bauer

WE FOUND ALBERT AND CHARLES IV standing in the road talking, they looked at us with some suspicion at first, as Luke and I approached them while Julia and Becca assessed a house, before joining us. Albert's home stood on the corner; it was gray with salmon trim, the color of my home.

Slate gray with salmon trim.

Albert told us that he'd been gutting out his home here, while Charles IV told us that he was from Mississippi now, but that he grew up on the other side of Claibourne [the area closest to where the levy broke, also in the lower 9th ward], and that that house in which he'd been raised, his childhood home, was now totally gone.

He had the best laugh lines.

Albert's home, Charles told us, had always been immaculate, the yard had always been immaculate...the house... immaculate. Charles told us that Albert's house had been one of the best in the neighborhood, as Albert beamed sheepishly, averting his eyes.

"It's nothing compared to what it used to be," Charles told us.

Then Albert told us his story. The water had risen so high, so fast, that he'd been stuck in his attic and he had had to chop his way through his roof so he could be airlifted off of it days later. He said:

"There are times that test you, that show if you've got it or if you don't. It's the difference between living and dying in that moment, and I was calm. I didn't panic, and that's why I am here today. Because I didn't panic."

He told us about people who were rescued out of the attic of a neighboring house, children whose mother drowned when the water rose too high.

Where Albert had been staying in the six months after the storm, he told us about the nightmares he had been having that caused the people with whom he was staying great alarm. He would wake in the middle of the night yelling and thrashing around, and drenched in sweat, dreaming about drowning. Charles told us that he had been in Desert Storm, and that he knew what Albert was feeling now was Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Albert told us about being in the Superdome, a place he said he doesn't ever want to go back to. He told us of what he'd witnessed, and how he had to be one of the best men he knew how to be, and that, in times like these, you could tell the good people from the bad people, and that he knows, because he's standing

in front of us today, that he was one of the good people.

The things that he told us remain to be told, here I take them so that I can share them, so that the education that can move us might do so.

He told us of seeing people shot for trying to get water for their children. He saw women raped and beaten. He told us that the people working at that place were working under martial law. The government abandoned the people, oppressed them, repressed them. That that was the purest form of inhumanity and racism, in that Superdome.

He told us about shit up to your waist, and people starving and he told us about it so calmly and so sadly.

"The military, them FEMA people, they'd bring in one palatte of food, or water, they'd bring in it surrounded by men with automatic weapons, ready to shoot anyone who came near it. Then they'd lower it down and drop it off, and back right out of there. They just leave it there and get out, and everybody'd fight for it. And those who got there first'd take more than they needed and sell it, and those who didn't fight went hungry."

In the Superdome, they wouldn't let people outside at all unless they formed neat and orderly lines, and, they both explained, when you're under that kind of stress and that kind of catastrophe, you just don't form neat and orderly lines.

Albert used the movable railings in the superdome and made structured lines, and as people saw what he was doing, they did the same. They began forming lines and getting lead outside. He told us that while he was there, he knew that he had to help other people, and that it was time to be the really good man that he is. But he knows he saved people and did what he could.

His story, but even more his endless hope, inspired us and made me marvel at the amazing capacity of the people I've met here, whose stories I've heard, for resilient strength, and a profound kind of interest in the good of people and life.

Albert showed us some of his artwork: wood carvings painted and varnished, completely beautiful. He lost many to the storm, and some to looters. They were beautiful; animals, designs, colorful and intricate. There was a crane, a dragon, they were delicate and deeply patterned. The conversation drew slowly to a close.

They asked us where we were from, and blessed us for being there...to which we dumbly fumbled for appropriately humble responses...I have yet to find these...and we got back into the car and drove to the next house on the list, for there was no way to thank them enough for sharing their stories and for being... 

Like a taste of a tiny piece of a day.

By Maya Bauer

...wake you up in the morning so early..

to tell you I've got the wandering blues

driving in a car around the lower ninth. I am in the passengers seat and the day is beautiful in a very ethereal way; driving through a tragedy so pure, and the sun shone and let the sky sit so blue, on top of a million things crushed.

We take part in the common interactions of humans, we also find a kind of solidarity, driving down those streets, because without being together we are nothing and our weakness will surely show. There are times that we feel the heaviness in a particular way and then it is vital to be in that car, in a framework, on a road... but together.

Talking to the people along the way, termed 'outreach', I found myself in touch with the grandest range of emotions and thoughts. Talking to people was, almost invariably, an amazingly freeing experience. That's hard to explain I guess. A dear friend, a resident of New Orleans, spoke to it in a way that made it a little easier to digest I suppose. He spoke the deep gratitude that astounded me from every interaction, he spoke to the availability for human connection. In a city so devastated, when so many have been neglected, forgotten, abused... representing not only solidarity but also something as simple as a listening ear to hear the story of one life, one struggle... as simple as coming from working in a neighborhood to talking to the people who lived there... lived...

As my friend said, no body wants to go into a dangerous



environment and sludge through toxic refuse, and to be there, to show a kind of shared humanity through action is something that just doesn't happen...no matter how sincere you are when you say that you're sorry, or that you recognize a tragedy.

We went up to one house and talked to these three men who were sitting by one of the men's homes. After brief introductions I started talking to one of the men, the simple things first; do you have a home around here? As we talked the story of his life began to come together, little fragment at a time. He told me about his kids. He told me about his home. He told me about racism. In the flood of... '65...? he lost his home and now 40 years later, in a different neighborhood of NoLA he had lost his home again. He said that the thing that really kept him going, really made it ok for him to be back in the lower 9th ward, was knowing that there were people, "people like them folks at common ground" fighting the legal battles, the political battles. He said that when you have your house and all your belongings taken from you you're just too tired, too tired to do all that fighting, but that it kept him going to know that someone was doing it for him.

As we got ready to go climb back into the little white borrowed car we introduced ourselves by name, and shook hands with all three of the men, and, in place of his name, the man I had been speaking with said, "Now I don't cry, cause it's just not something I do, but if I did cry this here'd about make me tear up, you all being here, it's a good thing yall are doing." ♦



• Photos by Tobin Porter-Brown •

• Photos by Molly McLeod •



Rough Day's Work



FEMA Trailers Arriving



Black Mold

Script for Audio Essay

by Jacob Lefton

Over spring break, I went to New Orleans to do relief work. The city is still devastated, even seven months after the disaster. The streets in the nicest sections of the city have half the people they used to, and many neighborhoods still have no one. The people I met while there who have come back to this city are brave, strong and dedicated. This is a story of one family whose future is still uncertain.

Serlio and Michelle

I got lice in New Orleans – which shouldn't surprise you in the slightest, as there were four hundred college students staying in close quarters with limited showers, for a week.

So Ashley and I find one of the open laundromats, which is no small task in this city – as half the businesses are still closed – and we wash all our bedding and clothing.

She gets her laundry up and running in the washing machine before I do, and when I find her, she is in the corner of the laundromat, on the floor, with a little girl Neisi and a little boy T.J., neither of whom can be older than two. It seems Ashley thought to bring paper and colored pencils, so the children are happily drawing. You can tell that the various parents were grateful for the break.

Ashley is possibly one of the most outgoing people that I've met. I get the idea that she just walked over to the children, sat down, and asked, "Do you want to draw?" After a while, she even offers the parents paper and pencils. Neisi's father, who signs his name "Serlio," gladly takes her up on the offer, and draws a picture that sticks with me to this day. When his wife Michelle comes back from whatever errand she was running, he passes the paper to Ashley. Peering over her shoulder, I see this image:



There is a house with gray clouds engulfing everything from the ground to the sky. Sitting on top of the house is a stick figure. The caption reads, "This is me on August 29th, 2005 waiting to be rescued." The other side has a smiling stick figure in the middle of a colorful landscape. It takes a moment for the image to sink in; for me to really understand that he and his family stayed during the hurricane and had to wait on rooftops to be rescued from the floodwaters.

Why did he just draw that? Why did he let us, two complete strangers, into a private part of his life? This is something that must be very difficult to talk about.

Oh, I know. I guess we, as relief workers, stand out. We're wearing clothing with emblems from out of state or the fist/hammer/red cross symbol of Common Ground, the organization we're volunteering for. We're obviously white, middle class kids in a predominantly black, working class neighborhood. It's easy to pick us out in this crowd.

Ashley asks, "What was it like?"

"We lived in a house with five units," Michelle says. "There were three here, and then two above them, and we were in the front top unit."

"It was really scary. I thought the whole house was going to fall apart, because the wind would blow and the whole thing would groan."

"There was a truck outside that sounded like a human being. The water level must have been rising, because all

I learned how to take out an entire kitchen

By Alfred Planco

of a sudden, the horn started going off, and then after a while, I guess the water rose more and started messing the truck up. The horn would die out, and it sounded sort of like someone crying, instead of a truck.

"I was scared, and he was too, but he didn't tell me because he knew I was scared.

"When the storm was over, we went up to the roof.

"Now, I'm from Chicago, so I'm not used to floods, but [my husband] He's from here. It didn't look any different to me, but when he saw the flood waters, he just said, 'Something's wrong.' We didn't know the levy had broken.

"When we got onto our roof, we saw some of our neighbors on their roofs. I was so relieved. I thought we were the only ones left."

At this point in her story, Serlio comes back with the photographs of the disaster. Michelle points to one and says, "There's a car parked in front of this house." Looking at the picture, I can't even see an outline of a car; the water level is so high.

The three of them have been living out of a hotel since FEMA gave them temporary housing. It's supposed to be a guaranteed eighteen months of housing, but they've been having problems.

"You open the paper on Sunday and see all these apartment listings," says Michelle, "but when you call on Monday morning, they're all gone. We've only got three days left of money, and I can't get a job because, you know, I'm pregnant. When our savings run out, we have nowhere else to go."

It's been seven months since the hurricane, and this family still does not have housing. Imagine how many families have been displaced when you walk through many neighborhoods in New Orleans and see row after row of empty houses and empty businesses. I don't know where Serlio, Michelle, and their daughter are today, but I hope things have worked out for them. ♣

Everything you own condensed into a clump
an unrecognizable heap
indiscernible goods

a life in a pile

Prosthetic legs leaned against
Smashed and overturned cars
Electric wheel chairs on porches
A walker spread open in the back bedroom

All abandoned by someone!

Removing lives from a house
Emptying out everything
That it was
Eliminating its humanity
Shelling it out

Gutting it

Minimalizing it

Bringing it back to its primal state
When it was just a frame

We removed lives from houses

All their personal possessions in a 4 by 4 region
A space that holds an allusion to an existence

Trophies
Mirrors
Polaroids with the color tuned to a greenish brown
Stuffed animal bodies
Stuffed animal heads
Mardi Gras beads preserved in convenient plastic bags
High School Diplomas
And most of all glasses filled with pitch-black ooze

That cakes like dried earth
Two inches thick on the floor

We removed lives from houses ♣

New Orleans

• Photos by Erik Roithmayr •



Martin Luther King, Jr.
Elementary School

Mud House

By Julia Sackett

THE ONLY WALKING NOW is the walking of sightseers, volunteers, workers paid by the city driving fast trucks that rattle the floorboards. Empty foundations and steps that lead to nowhere, cars parked in front of piles of lumber that used to be homes. June bugs make soft rhythm with their wings, lazy circles through dust motes and speckled green light, landing on rusted car mufflers and dolls, an oven mitt in the dust, dandelions growing gray and sparse.

Hats. Shoeboxes, gold shoes new and displayed, as if I put them there and not the storm. Makia my baby her elephant face down, its spine bare and decomposing, plush elephant skin stretched over plush elephant back face buried in six inches of black mud and broken dishes, fallen and half submerged already.

The refrigerator is down and it's opened, its contents are now buried in the mud and rotting. We once would eat crawfish and catsup, now it rots with the mustard and orange juice. The smell fills the kitchen, and the house, toxic warning to those who don't live here, people not like us, people who can come and leave but we are stuck so we smell it again and again.

The curtain has fallen on one of the living room windows; it lets in the light and dries the mud around the welcome mat. Sometimes the wind moves the curtains there, it blows across my face and smells fresh but it stops. Sometimes I can smell the sea or I think I can but it is dark in the hallway where I am, and the walls are growing darker every day with the mold as it grows and grows. It's the only thing that lives here now.

My son Malik's wallpaper has trucks and backhoes around the top, near the ceiling, left over from when he was little. The trucks are blue and the backhoes are yellow, yellow and blue all around the room. Sometimes I hear trucks outside moving quickly, driving fast and hitting all the potholes. They drive like no one was ever here and no one will be back, they drive like they are running away from something fast and fearful. We are here, goddamn it, we never left. I'm still here, goddamn it. It didn't used to be this way, oh Lord. I think the ceiling might cave in today. Maybe tomorrow or the next day, someday soon now. I can see Malik's posters peeling, there is mold on Beyoncé's face. His books have all been water washed, flooded they've been flooded and the mold has moved in close behind. The curtain there has parted a little, it lets the light in over his bed, crusted with mud. I wonder if there's porn under that bed, God save him, it's moldy now most likely. I wouldn't care if there were, not now.

The hallway seems to get smaller every day, and my feet are getting larger and larger, they used to be so delicate. The wood paneling has come off the walls, nothing more than plastic really it's bulging like it was burned and falling graceful and slow. The attic ladder is still down, where we left it. It hangs above my head. Maybe it will fall too, one of these days. The white paint has all

peeled from the bottom rung. Who will climb it, now? My arms are sodden. We are stuck, we are stuck! I smell all over, the house is so heavy, the floorboards are bulging under the weighted carpet once white but now it's mud, a carpet of mud, Search and Rescue called it flood mud, flood mud in my hair around my ears and making my eyes go dark. I'm crying all the time now, floodwater leaks and leaks out of me and makes water stains on the walls, adds another waterline on the wallpaper and invites the mold to make black mosaics on the sagging ceiling. It will fall tomorrow and bury me for good.

My fingers are turning into floorboards. They get stiff and long and hard, buried in the mud, callused and dark they are no longer mine, contorted and bulging and grasping at my house oh my house my life oh my life clutching clutching. My ribcage is splitting wider and wider, it doesn't hurt because nothing hurts anymore. Wider and wider and wider, my ribs had become strips of wallpaper and they are brown and soggy and heavy and peeling and falling as soon as they grew.

The chandelier in the living room was my grandmother's, when she lived on Frenchman street in the thirties and she was poor but she had that thing, that thing and the blue glass would glisten and reflect and it would give her hope on long hungry nights. When she moved out she made them tear it from the ceiling and give it to her, and she left it to me when she died, so it would glisten and bring me hope on long hungry nights. The glass has come down, chiseled blue teardrops they are clouded now and brown from the outside but I wish I could see them. The weight of my head is too much for me, chains me to the muddy floor and I am stuck, I am stuck I am stuck. The chandelier trembles, bare brass bones and I wonder who has come no one has come. The rumbling of the trucks only gets louder and louder, and shakes my shingles.

There are loud voices outside now and my toe has splintered, this is a moving house. I hear crashes and wood breaking glass and yesterday a plastic bag flew in from the hole in my cheek and fluttered around the room, not touching anything, not touching the walls the muddy insides of my mouth and my tooth the couch and it blew out again. The hole has dried the mud on the kitchen floor it has cracked and separated a quiet desert among the rats.

I hear the bulldozers coming closer now, down the street they scratch the asphalt mercilessly crunch crunch crunching bones and studs and nails, roofs becoming rib-cage- garbage for the trucks (those heavy wheels) to pick up and crunch crunch crunchingly dispose of.

I feel lighter already, like trucks have eaten me and spit me back as toxic dust to float away into trees and june-bugs and lungs of volunteers. Sharp shingles splinter studs goodbye.

I am free.

I am free. ♀

A Not So Common Ground

By Tucker Slosburg

First, I want to thank Jacob Lefton, if not for his encouragement and insistence, this essay would never have been written. Going against dominant trend of thought is never an easy thing to do. Writing something that one knows will upset people makes the task all the more difficult. Nevertheless, having a slightly different perspective on the trip to New Orleans, I've been asked to write them down. I will not address the amount of devastation we encountered in our week in New Orleans because I think those issues have been well explained. Instead, I want to offer a different perspective on the group we worked with: Common Ground. I ask that the reader read with care before becoming outraged. New Orleans was and will always be a sensitive subject to anyone who went down.

Upon arrival, I thoroughly enjoyed the Common Ground experience. It was a relaxed atmosphere of people seemingly united by the work they were doing. This, I thought, was good. I enjoyed the sense of people helping other people. People were proud of the work they were doing, and I was more than happy to participate in such an event. It was only as the week progressed that some of my skepticism came to light. Common Ground encouraged many of the workers one day to attend a Veterans For Peace march. I recognize that the group helped Common Ground get off to a good start, however, I couldn't understand the good that would come of potential workers attending a march instead of working on houses. Since I was leading a work group I went up to two of the guys from the group that had served in Iraq, and asked what they wanted to do. "There's no way I'm going to that march," one of them said. He continued, "Don't get me wrong, I was there and I'm against the war. But I came down here to do relief work, not protest a war." That stuck with me the rest of the week.

I think some of my frustration comes from the implicit assumptions made by many of the folks at Common Ground. The group's web page does not explicitly state the political agenda of the program. Most people were against the war, against racism, against bigotry, and all sorts of other ideals that I believe are good things. Specifically, the group was fighting local political pressure about potential demolition of the 9th Ward. If one went down to Common Ground leaning moderate to right, he or she would find themselves marginalized in a very serious way. I mentioned my thoughts to another young women, who said that she was moderate and felt quite marginalized throughout the week. Perhaps, it was the saturation

of liberalism that got to me. Irregardless, it raised some issues that I found trouble. Now, I happen to subscribe to the dominant liberal politics of the day, however, I had trouble swallowing the degree of closed-mindedness I found at Common Ground.

Simply put, this is what I got from Common Ground: "sure we are open minded—as long as you agree with us." It took me a week to recognize this because, for the most part, I agree in an ideological way with Common Ground's ideals. Despite my sympathies, I found the dichotomy of promoting open-mindedness, while disregarding others' values quite troubling.

Perhaps I ought to elaborate on the conception of open-mindedness for a moment, afterall, Common Ground wants people to be sensitive to each other. Eva Brann, one of the great thinkers of our age, put it well: "Open-mindedness is nothing more than understanding and respecting others' values and beliefs, while subscribing to one's own set of beliefs." Ideally, we will be undisturbed by thoughts and values that differ from our own; nevertheless, we follow our own beliefs. Certainly Common Ground can prescribe to its own set of beliefs, but that people at Common Ground feel marginalized because of their beliefs, in my mind, seems in direct contrast to the notion of respecting differing views. Moreover, Common Ground offered some cases where it promoted one idea and acted to the contrary.

The organization promotes its open mindedness and cultural sensitivity. However, any attempt at discussing the feeling of futility of rebuilding was met with me being insensitive to peoples' needs. The mere fact that no one running the organization would really engage in conversation about the feeling that rebuilding seemed almost futile, was a real shock. I'm not for the demolition of the 9th Ward, but any attempt to discuss otherwise was cast down directly from the group's organizers.

Now in terms of cultural sensitivity, we were given many talks on respecting the 9th Ward and not treating the place like another party spot on spring break. To me, this mentality made sense. Certainly we could have a little fun to keep our spirits up, but we didn't want to party around a Catholic School that we were guest in. So, when Common Ground host a rock concert on the steps of the school, amplifying the music into the neighborhood, I tend to wonder what Common Ground means when they say cultural sensitivity. Moreover, students were juggling things on fire, hoola-hooping, and dancing in the street—

literally. For a moment I attempted to go with the flow, but couldn't. The paradox of cultural sensitivity struck me to hard to dance. It didn't seem right.

Now lets look at the slogan for Common Ground: "Solidarity not Charity." At first this makes sense. I liked this phrase. I believed I was in solidarity with the community, or at least I wanted to believe so. Solidarity is not the problem, however. I recognize that Common Ground is working from within the community in an attempt to help people out. The trouble with the phrase is actually the word "charity." After a week in New Orleans, I'm hard pressed to believe that I did not do charity work. I may have done it with the local residents, but I did charity work. I went down as a white privileged male and helped a predominantly black community wrecked by disaster. They needed help. That's why we went down. Saying that we are not doing charity work actually upsets me because then I'm left wondering what I did. It's not that I went down to feel good about myself, but if I didn't help out, I want to know what I did.

I'm told that the phrase is an attempt to move past any stigma designated to those who need help. Now, this sounds well and good, but I can't for the life of me figure out what is actually being accomplished. Needing people's charity is often a result of circumstance. For instance, I'm from Kansas City. A tornado could strike at any moment and wipe out my neighborhood. There is no way to predict its movement. As soon as my house is gone, as soon as my neighborhood becomes level by a high level tornado, I become a charity case. I, and my family, would need the help of others. There is nothing wrong with this. It's a tragedy and life is unfair. We all at different times go through trouble.

Now, many of you are about to rip this apart because I have yet to discuss the racial politics involved in such a situation, thus making things drastically different. Yes, there are racial politics involved. There are theories that the levees were blown up to racially purge the city. There are many previous factors that caused the disaster. To deny such events would be foolish and ignorant. My concern however is that these people needed help because of a disaster. I'm not so concerned at the moment with how

they ended up where they did, whether it was because of racism and politics in the city of New Orleans, or any other reason. They had no homes! That is why I went to New Orleans. That constitutes the need for people's charity. To go down to New Orleans and be told that I'm not doing charity work seriously makes me question what exactly it was that I was doing. The residents of the area certainly thought I was helping them. Perhaps I'm helping move past racial barriers and breaking down any negative stigmas, but I fail to see how. I went down to help out people who needed help. Not because these people can't do it on their own, but because they could use some help. Everyone I met seemed appreciative of the help.

I went down to New Orleans because it was the right thing to do. I went down because I had no previous commitments, no work to do, and I had the means to go. In my mind, there was no question about what I should do over break.

break. I like the idea that the highest level of giving in Judaism is an anonymous giver to an anonymous receiver. I like this because the act transcends the individual. This is why going down was the right thing. It didn't matter if I met the owner of the house, I didn't mind if they met me. My concern was that a disaster occurred, people needed help, and the right thing to do was to go down to New Orleans. New Orleans could have been Mississippi, or it could have been anything else. I went down to help people whose lives have been disrupted in a major way. This is charity, even if it sounds like I've stigmatized a group. They've been stigmatized only insofar as they have experienced a tragedy. People can read more or less in to that. That, however, is the crux of it.

Now, I've gone on at great length about my thoughts. Before I close, however, I must let you all know that I do care about the area. It would be a tragedy to see the 9th Ward fall prey to eminent domain. I hope the levees are fixed. I'd like to see the race relations in the city fixed. And yes, I am against the war in Iraq. For the life of me, however, I could not see how Common Ground was open to people who had thoughts other than their own. ♦



*Overheard at
Veterans for Peace Rally*

MOTHER:
Do you know why we're here?

Boy:
For peace.

MOTHER:
Do you know the difference
between peace and war?

Boy:
Peace means being nice to
people.

People Are People and These People Are in Destitution

By Alfred Planco

Voices stripped
Voice boxes ripped
Spread across the country
No home to go back to
No community
Not even a store

As Trump sits in an office
Far above the floodwater mark
Where no wave could crash
Drawing up plans for a
Future community
A new community
Built atop racism
And unfound bodies

The Levees broke—
Or were they broken?

The buildings were destroyed
Displaced
Or structurally unsound
Lucky houses just needed a gutting
Which is far from “just”

Brick houses
Standing alone
Constantly recalling the story
Of the three little pigs

More are still “missing” than official died
To get the final report you need to ask the
crocodiles,
and
the still collapsed houses

Those who were left were shipped off
As far as New York City

Break the community!
Make them widespread!

Make a New New Orleans
With less crime
And
Fewer drugs

Just tell them that the black mold
Gives you cancer

And off in the distance
Mammoth drills
Pound away
Building the levees a whole two feet higher!
Solving every problem 



• Photo by Rebecca Crenshaw •



• Photo by Anna Riechmann •

Journal Entries

By Hannah Gaschott

Tuesday, March 21st 2006

I am the happiest here, than I have been in a very long time. I am constantly reminded of how lucky I am and how many things I take for granted. I feel alive. So incredibly alive. My life is my own. It is precious. I am far from home and I feel like I can do anything. I need so little and yet there is so much need surrounding me...so much time and energy I have to give. It makes me feel joyful, hopeful, inspired. I have no boundaries. I cannot find reason for fear for I am surrounded by people who kill it; who make it seem so unimportant. I can't comprehend what it is going to be like to go back to school and take some paper seriously. It seems so small and insignificant. I fear that I am going to feel useless. I see there is so much I can actually DO here, and at school I will go back to working for my own personal gain...not really doing much. The people here are so hopeful...so strong. I feel like I need to be here to give myself hope, to help give others hope. Nothing but that seems to matter. I cannot bring myself to want much more. Hope is so much. Love is so much. It is all there really is.

Monday, March 26th 2006

Back at Hampshire

Being back here is the strangest thing I have ever felt. To wake up alone in my own personal room surrounded by things that I don't need and didn't miss. I realize my possessions have numbed me. They have me chained to comfort, sensibility and safety. To walk into SAGA and not have to scrounge for clean dishes and have tons of food and so many choices ... so many white faces and so much privilege. I hate academia. I wish I were a million miles from here. I don't know how to bring myself back. I can't be here, now. I don't fit. I'm outside St. Mary's in my mind...I am dripping sweat, tearing down a wall...my whole self is still there. I am still breathing the air and sleeping on the floor. My heart is still pumping the faces and the stories through my bloodstream. It is in me. Here, I feel I am not living. I am not truly alive. It aches. ♦

• Photo by Rebecca Crenshaw •



Poems

By Jezra Beaulieu

The Basin

There is a history of this destruction that has climactically erupted in the form of a whirling wind and flowing flood. The mélange of environments and identities have merged into a chaotic structure that settles to the bottom like gold. Weak pillars are supporting the strongest bridge, and strong pillars are supporting the weakest bridge. Every particle of air is submerged in a damp towel of dreary anticipation as ironic and perplexive systems sweep the city of our nation's past, disclosing our true 'grassroots.' Higher elevations are traditionally the ground of safety, which happens to be the residence of our elite. The valley however has been pushed aside as the mountains converged their terrain. Now they have widened and stepped back from this cramp, only to let the summits turn their heads away from the dirt they emerged from. This black dirt is how life proceeds. This ward may be the last to be noticed, but it is the first in the evolution of this life that has brought us to our presence. Without this dirt, there is nowhere to grow—nothing to work against or toward—no roots or branches to spread their wings.

Guts

My soles touch the ground of a hidden seashell floor
I wait for the sound from under the mound
Then tiptoe my way through their world.

{This poem is a series of symbols that can describe the racist dichotomy of the tourists in New Orleans. As I willingly participated in this tradition, I questioned my position in the wellbeing of the community. I was donating my body, while they were donating their drunken cash.}

Laughters of a façade smile past the fallen balconies
Only to proceed to the next Mecca

Continuously following

They congregate in protected clusters
Drowned in their materials and hiding behind their lense
They do not know what is next,
Their smiles are drowned in laughter.

Every second holds its breath for the next door to open
The next drink to buy
To next wind to arrive

The line that connects each house in destructive unity is that of the water.

It indicates the amount that has been distributed
As a symbol of discrimination
It continues for many sidewalks and parades in joyous colors of festivity.
The trees and lights are decorated in their height
As survivors awaited their rooftop rescue
Every fallen shingle is the symbol of a death—
A symbol of a gasped breath

Intricate gates of iron decorate the separation of black and white

Yet the unfiltered air still flows between them and intoxicates us all.
As privilege intoxicates a clothed and fed mind

I found that the creeping oaks survived to neutralize this disequilibrium

And stretch towards the windows of our lives.
For every glass has shattered
Every wood has split
Every metal has bent ♫



• Photo by Zac Phillips •

Journal Entries

By Natalie Millis

Wednesday 22 march.

So I volunteered to go to group leader training on Sunday morning. Even though I'm only here for a week, I decided that it would be worth a day spent training because common ground appeared to be struggling to keep the sudden influx of spring break volunteers organized. We gathered after the morning meeting and our leader, Ryan, informed us that the house they were going to train us with was "the dirtiest house on the list" in the lower ninth ward so that we would be properly initiated; "make sure you grab a pair of latex gloves for under your work gloves". He walked off without saying much else. We stood around for a while smoking cigarettes and inquiring into each other's places of origin and topics of study. Then Ryan came back with the driver of the van. "Uh, they wanted me to tell you guys that two bodies were found in the house. I wanna make sure that doesn't, like, freak anyone out?" We glanced around, said nonchalant things, and piled in the van with all of our tools. The small talk continued until we passed the river and the destruction behind the levee to our right. We fell silent.

It was cool and grey out. The house had been hit within a minute of the levee collapsing; it was one of few standing entirely intact in the area. We suited up without saying anything, and suddenly it struck me that there was nothing but the sound of the breeze moving the hundreds of abandoned doors open and shut. I kept staring at the triage information sprayed over the front window, especially the 2 on the bottom of the X. The property owner opened the door, thanked us, and wished us good luck.

The air hit me first—chemicals, shit, dirt, and a nauseating sour smell. Inside was a uniformly brown stew of plaster, furniture, and clothing that ranged from knee to chest height. Ryan showed us how to make sure the power and gas were cut off (even though neither are working in the neighborhood anyway), and without further fanfare the gutting began. We shoveled sodden and decaying clothing and blankets into wheelbarrows and

pulled out the damp couches and mattresses. There was black mold blooming in huge swaths across the walls and tapioca-looking orange mold in the crevices of the sheets and cushions. Even through my respirator the smell was lively.

I was feeling alright until I started seeing educational coloring books and tiny pairs of shoes, and then the extra orange blankets still sitting folded and unused where the recovery workers must have left them when they cleared the house... I took a few deep breaths and continued to gather slippery and slightly warm fabric in my hands.

I was feeling alright until I started seeing educational coloring books and tiny pairs of shoes, and then the extra orange blankets still sitting folded and unused where the recovery workers must have left them when they cleared the house...

Once all of the belongings were out of the house and we started clearing the drywall, I began to question if what we were doing was actually going to be useful and if the house could be saved. It didn't resist us at all; its planks behind the plaster separated like butter. The trim was so pliable around the floor that my crowbar was pretty much useless. I was taking out framing around a window and the whole thing just came out in my arms. Sweat began to pool in the bottom of my mask. I was peeling out insulation and uncovered nests of huge cockroaches. We

were surprised by one another. They swarmed around in confusion; they kept falling on me, touching my hair, going down my sleeves. I watched them intently for a long time. In fact, I can't believe I stood knee deep in a horrifying disaster zone and spent so many minutes ruminating on how idiotic but brilliantly successful cockroaches are.

But anyway. At maybe 1:00 we heard a Red Cross truck coming from far away (their enthusiastic and self-congratulatory loudspeakers are distinctive) and broke for lunch. Strange that they were spending their time and money driving around the ninth ward feeding mostly volunteers—the people who need it least. The middle-aged women in the truck proffered canned beef(?) and green beans to us with bright smiles. I thanked them and kept my thoughts about their organization under my tongue.

I was dizzy with hunger and swallowed the flavorless meat chunks without chewing. I don't remember what we talked about. Mostly I looked around and realized the visual shock of the rubble and general third-world look of the environment around me had worn off. Later when I was peeing behind a flood-wrecked car in someone's backyard I saw savage looking dogs foraging in trash across the street. They had clearly moved past their previous identities of Fido, Spot, and Fluffy; I imagined them hunting me.

Screen doors creaked and air whispered through the cavities of those houses.

I came back to our site just in time to see Ryan and two other guys duct tape the fridge shut three times for good luck and force it out the frame of the back door. They took it by dolly to the biohazard pile. Ryan turned to us. "Hey, guys! I know they said in training to NEVER open a refrigerator, but do you want to see what's inside? Unforgettable!" White chunky water drained slowly from the bottom. I caught a hint of the stench from 30 feet away and decided my curiosity was satiated.

Tourists passed by in large SUVs. When I looked at them I felt such reckless and uncontrollable malice. I'm not sure exactly why. But there are so many things I couldn't

put into words right then... not for me, not for them, not for us. And so I said nothing and they went on their way.

We worked until four, the property owner came back to pick us up and we rode exhausted back to common ground. The thing that I will remember best, I think, about all of the houses I work on is all the small and intimate details. The calendar on the wall of the kitchen, still on the month of August with ink reminders of birthdays and the first day of school. Dominos sticking out of the mud in the corner of the bedroom. A Happy Graduation! foil balloon. Photographs. I had pulled a filthy but intact old vase out from behind the remains of some cardboard boxes and set it aside on the porch in case any relatives knew it and wanted it.

At the end of each day I come back exhausted like I've never been. I barely have the energy to think about what I am seeing before sleep takes me. It is so surreal that all I will know about the people who lived and died in that house is what their decaying belongings smell like and how that mix of splintered wood, shoes, appliances, and dolls feels under my feet. ♦

Notes on Post-Katrina Portrait Project

by Molly McLeod

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, a young artist by the name of Francisco diSantis traveled down to the Gulf Coast region to collect stories. He began an interactive art project called Post-Katrina Portraits. He draws lovely charcoal portraits of people - locals, hurricane survivors, relief workers and volunteers - and they then handwrite their story in the empty space around their portrait. For those who are illiterate, can't write their story for themselves, or would prefer to tell it orally, a scribe will record their story and then write it on their portrait for them; it is rare Francisco is able to find someone willing to come along and scribe, so this doesn't happen often, but I spent one day being a scribe, and it was a very powerful experience, collecting the stories of people.

Francisco has been in the Gulf Coast, primarily New Orleans, since September, and so far has done about 400 portraits that people have written on, and many other portraits which are still waiting for a story - he's probably heard more stories about Katrina than any other single person. On my last day in New Orleans, he pronounced his arms and hands too sore from six months of drawing several portraits daily, and very soon he plans to begin pursuing a publisher to turn the project into a book.

Francisco has a somewhat strict philosophy about the project, and he makes everyone read the mission statement before he begins their portrait. The mission statement begins fairly straightforward: "Have a story to tell of life in the Gulf Region since August of 2005? Don't just hate the (corporate) media, become (your own) media! Because silence is surrender! The Post-Katrina Portraits will contribute to the self-empowerment of your voice. If the medium is the message, then our message will be the faces and thoughts of those who care about New Orleans... Out of all that make sure not to leave out what you have done, as it is a sketch of you." As for those who were not born and raised in the area, he cautions not to allow their story to go beyond what they have seen with their own eyes. Each entry is like "a chip in a mosaic, a part of a comprehensive documentary, and inclusive public journal, a broad based educational tool."

Maya Baur and Julia Sackett continued this project back at Hampshire, sketching fellow students who were in New Orleans. On the following pages are the first portraits in their series. ♦

New Orleans

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE BEING TOLD [after hearing the story of the utter destruction of his home, of his life, and of his family, about his escape, about the hunger, racism, + fear about his sadness] **THAT US FOLKS JUST BEING** there brings TEARS TO HIS EYES... THAT SOMEONE REALLY CARES. **IT HUMBLES THE SOUL.**

TAKE THE TIME. EDUCATE YOURSELF. IT DOESN'T TAKE TOO LONG.

In my time in New Orleans [NOLA] I saw so much devastation and inequality, I heard stories that would break your heart, even one has such an amazing story to share.

The beauty of those people, in their gratitude, in their pain, in an outlook on life so supremely full of life.

In my time in New Orleans I thought a lot about my privilege. I felt like an intruder. I felt like I was using my privilege + imposing my ignorance on a system already burdened by political government ignorance.

In my time in NOLA I felt deeply. I felt that COMMON GROUND was doing a respectful thorough work. Addressing our place as guests needing to be responsible and respectful in someone else's community. Working with a community.

GET ORGANIZED.
CHANGE SOMETHING!

In Solidarity,
Maya



SOLIDARITY NOT CHARITY

• If people get educated they CAN NOT and WILL NOT STAND the injustice they are SUBJECT TO
→ It made me think + start to understand the power of education. It made me believe again in starting a grassroots Revolution!



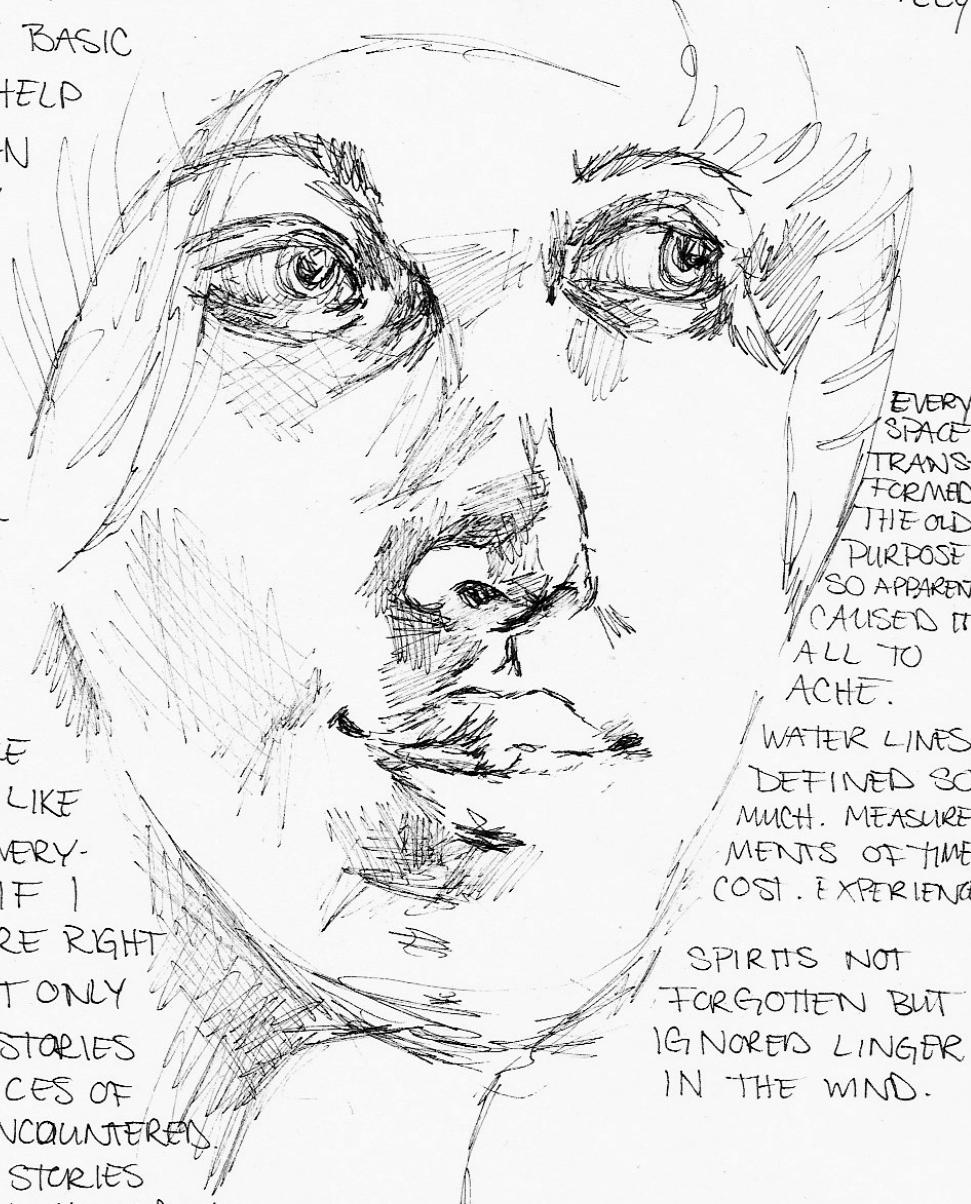
I'm home from New Orleans and it's like no other coming home I've ever experienced, like going to war. I don't know exactly what to say to people who went there with me. I feel like crying all the time now, and I'm not sure who I'm sad for. I feel so confused. Half of me still feels so bipolar, New Orleans bipolar, the high highs and the low lows, but I feel that intensity leaving me and I miss it. I miss it? But I do, because when I was there I was doing ~~such~~ good for someone besides myself and that was what my life was all about, and in that environment all boundaries of real life fell apart - where people formed relationships with each other without pretense because everything else but ourselves was scary. I feel like everyone there became fearless out of desperate necessity, because it was so hard to do the job asked of me, because every time I got out of

The car I became ten years older, ten years more burdened and weighted with the thought of what I was looking at - these houses so battered as their owners had been battered by the system they had done so much to support. Because seeing an American flag hung outside a bowed and buckled home, beached like a whale in the middle of the street - what kind of justice is that? What kind of freedom is that?

One thing I can take from New Orleans though, is that DOING is better than worrying about it and not doing anything.

New Orleans

WE CAME WITH THE POWER AND PRIVILEGE AND ABILITY TO LEAVE. STAY FOR JUST ONE WEEK. I DEVOTED MY ENTIRETY. MY WHOLE SELF TO THE PEOPLE OF NEW ORLEANS. I WAS COMPLETELY CONSUMED. THE BASIC INTUITION TO HELP A FELLOW HUMAN IN NEED OF MY PRESENCE. FOR ANYTHING, I WAS THERE. WILLING. SO RIGHT. IT FELT TO MAKE MYSELF USEFUL IN EVERY WAY NECESSARY. I WILL LIVE THIS WAY FOREVER... CHANGED. THERE ARE INSTANCES LIKE NEW ORLEANS EVERYWHERE. EVEN IF I CAN'T BE THERE RIGHT NOW. I WILL NOT ONLY PASS ON THE STORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE PEOPLE I ENCOUNTERED BECAUSE THEIR STORIES NEED TO BE TOLD. HEARD. LISTENED TO. BUT I WILL LOOK WITHIN MY OWN IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY TO BRING LIGHT TO THE FUCKA INJUSTICES PLAGUING OUR WORLD. THE CONNECTIONS I MADE WILL BE IN ME. REMINDING ME OF THE POWER I PERSONALLY AM CAPABLE OF. EVERY PERSON HOLDS THE POTENTIAL TO HELP. TO CHANGE. TO START SOMETHING. ANYTHING THAT WILL OPEN AND EDUCATE. PEOPLE WILL LISTEN. PEOPLE WILL CHANGE. WE NEED TO TALK.



EVERY SPACE TRANSFORMED THE OLD PURPOSE SO APPARENT CAUSED IT ALL TO ACHIEVE.

WATER LINES DEFINED SO MUCH. MEASUREMENTS OF TIME COST. EXPERIENCE

SPIRITS NOT FORGOTTEN BUT IGNORED LINGER IN THE WIND.

WHEN I first arrived at the airport in New Orleans, I immediately had my eyes peeled for any sign of Katrina, any damage to the building...but everything looked in good shape. I also had my eye out for what kind of people were there. I don't know what I was expecting, maybe everyone to look downtrodden, but there were people from all walks of life, just like any airport.

THAT afternoon I visited the Lower 9th Ward. Even after seeing it with my own eyes, it was still unbelievable. There were houses turned 90° and laying half caved in on their sides, there were houses on top of cars, there were houses missing completely from where they should have been. There was a broken kiddie pool in the street, and I pictured in my head a beaming parent bringing it home to several laughing kids, and I wondered where they were now. It was all very surreal. It was a nice, sunny day outside, there were birds singing and butterflies flying all around. The Lower 9th felt haunted, forgotten, abandoned for 50 years.

MY first day gutting houses, I found a giant, gorgeous painting of two huskies. I showed it to the homeowner, Johnny Edwards, and he said he had carried it with him for 37 years. I asked him if he wanted me to set it aside, and he told me to throw it away along with everything else I found. All the destruction caused by Katrina is a tragedy, but for me it's also a lesson in materialism. All of the homeowners of the houses I gutted wanted to get rid of everything in the house - all their life long possessions, photographs, clothes, art, awards, books. It all had to go...

THINK I expected to meet mostly forlorn, miserable, hapless people. Yet every single New Orleanian I met had such overwhelming strength, courage, wisdom, beauty, and love when I first arrived at the airport. I had no idea what to expect, and I didn't remotely consider returning after Spring Break. But when I left the airport, I knew I left a piece of my heart in New Orleans, and I plan to return for it some day.



Molly

Never know what to write when asked to. It was an amazing time. I'm glad I went.



I think the thing that struck me the most about being there was the sense of history. I've never felt air so heavy with history before. and probably why I never felt anything like that is because everywhere else I've been has been someone else's history. Sitting in Armstrong Park, I felt my history resting on my shoulders. It was sort of eerie and beautiful and tragic all at the same time.

I hope I can go back soon.

The saddest thing: picking up a Langston Hughes collection of poetry from 1 1/2' of mud and sewage, and putting it on the trash pile.

The happiest thing: opening it up and finding all the pages clean, unsmudged, as if the pages were new.

New Orleans will come out of this tragedy just fine.

It's a Rockin' city.

It only needs its people to
Return, and they will,
with time.

Also, it was amazing to be
with people from all over the
U.S. - so different from each
other, yet friends because
we all were there to help.

The trip down there made me
feel, in the truer sense,
patriotic.

Jennie





6 Months after the storm and there are still houses in the road, cars piled in people's lawns and the levee 5 is not being built the way it needs to be. New Orleans residents say "It is like living in a 3rd world country." They need HELP.

From the government or from grass root orgs, they need ~~body~~ bodies to labor and \$ to rebuild.

Re-NEW ORLEANS

Chandler Patten
Chandler.Patten@smith.edu
r.e.

EVERYBODY has the power to do something about new orleans. all it takes is a little bit of time. you don't have to be there to make a difference. donate ~~water~~ money, volunteer to help organize, or help out with research. anything can help. we all have the time and resources to do something. it's up to you to exercise that power. i hope you will. lives still depend on it.



New Orleans

My experience in New Orleans might have been a little different from most of the volunteers. I was lucky enough to have my dear godfather, Erik, to stay with. He lived in the Bywater just blocks away from the lower 9th ward. Besides sleeping at his house, using his shower and borrowing his clothes I was introduced to a fun, magical, bohemian social scene that was radically different from the gutting houses, volunteer world.

All I have to say is... CHEESE NIPS! When hunger strikes CHEESE NIPS were there for the rescue. Though, after just a day of knocking down moldy walls and absorbing the reality of the situation, we were thankful for any food that was given to us.

Each parish (neighborhood) of the city seemed radically different. The lower 9th ward was a disaster zone, the French quarter had a very European feel, the CBD (Central Business District) could have been New York City, the Garden district had beautiful old mansions, the Bywater was fun and funky, and I wasn't able to visit the other ones. New Orleans had character.

Tobin Porter-Brown



I am astonished how corrupt is the New Orleans government. The police are not a public service, they are an industry in hopes to get bail money in return. I have heard stories of disappearing in the government's hands.

So many horror stories of the super dome. A living hell. Whispers of rape, murder, marshal law gone out of hand... things that would be censored in all US media.



Journal Entries

by Rebecca Buckleystein

March 17th 2006

Please don't think I'm mighty for doing anything because from the start of today all I've really wanted was to go home to my mom and sleep. But I am extremely thankful to be here. Where stories seem to float in the air and everyone is everyone and it's warm but the sun isn't the source of great joy, like it is in the summer, because really when shit hits the fan I am only now noticing how sad this is. And I'm trying so hard to block that all out. But maybe in some lighter sense it feels like a motion filled city, a city of change, rebirth and death, a city of sorrow and sorrow and existence. I am dirty and I smell too human for comfort but I like that too. I like feeling like I'm here (here). All of me and none of me and everything and always I am here and at home and outside.

Sorry Paul Jenkins, these are the pages of my poetry notebook, I'll try to be poetic on these pages, but still I am sorry (and not really sorry too...you won't be mad I'm sure).

And I really miss Ms. Emma Spear-Brodsky. She would be so real here, always always checking my moves, she wouldn't know what to do either but when people are absent they must be missed. New Orleans does not know Ms. Emma Spear-Brodsky but she would love Elvis the four week old puppy and she would find the perfect shadows to cast over pink sheet rock debris, because she is missed and missing and I miss her so she would know and knows and I wish I was with her a lot. I really do miss that girl.

Coughing.

Bing.

"You're not working in the kitchen today?"

Hannah writes right here beside me and I miss her too. I miss her. Because I am far away from her, because she is not me and I'm not her. And no matter how much you love a person you can never be them (and that's not really a bad thing) but it makes me miss her always.

My skin is tired and my eyes are delirious (bird chirp) with stimulation (period)

March 18/19th 2006

Children and roaches and stubborn pigeons

We are our parent's children
child, children, child, child
we are cleaning up our messes and your messes

and

this revolution will not be masturbatory and
we will not serve dessert
although we will love you , love you, grace you
and put you in the back of a pick up truck
pick you up on Bourbon and drive you into
the hearts of drowning middle school children
drowning Polaroids
and prayer beads
and black virgin Marys
covered in black mold - covered
but the cockroach still pitters away after its intestines
have squeezed out of its anus and
the mosquitos still want you like they want molasses and
glue and toxic flood water
and water and hydrogen and nineteen year old liberals
and me.

But we are the products of love revolutions and
our parent's generation has died in
Evian and Poland Springs and shit. And it is not
glorious.

Yes, there are love stories (tragic) and family stories
(tragic) and dog stories (tragic)
but its not yours, please understand
this ocean of tents and dirty dishes and respirators
it is not yours and it is not mine
and we will never know it
and I will always wish I could forget it and loose it
and hold it and take it for my own but this-
this story, this voice, these words should not be spoken
by me

because I am not these people's narrator and I am not
these people's saviors and I am not innocent.

I am whispering to you the shouts and screams and
skeletons so abruptly left behind

the picture frames and insurance receipts and wheel
chairs that I place in an orange wheel barrel and put along
the cracked uprooted pavement of

"city" streets and this middle school still holds them
and still teaches them and still speaks, but they do not
sit in classroom desks and they do not come up to the
chalkboard any longer

they linger on the roof and pray to their black virgin and
black Jesus and black God that they will never leave and
never take free meals and never wash their hands free

again

they sit there except their blood has dried in the mud
and their urine has evaporated into grey clouds and the

pigeons do not move when you walk by-

no

they will not flutter away because we should not be here now

we should not be here fighting the pigeons and stomping the cockroaches only to let them

linger a little longer.

I have been bitter before in ways I always imagined were tragic and glorious and righteous and I have been angry before in ways that made my lungs pound and my fists curl and my throat open until it opened and let everything out and in at the same time.

I have been apathetic before, when every person's passion and love and joy was all tainted and yellow and pointless. And I have felt displaced before, on first conversations and first sex and last goodbyes that I did not want. But I have never held this before, no this is new, to be curious about what sits underneath me and what was once floating through a stale stream that rose above where I stand. I want to hear the stories behind these screen doors and industrial toilets that hold 3.5 gallons of black mold and oil and swamp. I want to know how this dog's skeleton has come to the corner of this yard and how this spray painted message "Charles will call" was written after the water went back up and back down and after this terrible terrible ocean waved away and left its ripples on the cheekbones and on the church walls and on the tree roots. But I don't dare to hear the stories I see. No I do not want to listen, I just want to see the faces left behind, tearless brave and cold. I just want to look at these bent houses and bent walls and bent homes and let the stories come without words.

And I will not, do not cry, and do not work with all my teenage strength and heart and will. No. I reserve myself and keep it all away, farther away than the stench of rotting wood and rotting grass and rotting rot. I want it to be so separate from the children who floated to death and the mothers who killed their own throats and the husbands who disappeared and who sank with the liquid sun one terrible terrible Monday. No, I do not want a picture taken and I would rather not document this moment. But I want to someday remember this love and these abandoned

survivors generosity and I want to remember this awful vomiting joy and this ecstatic fear and this wonderful collective bone penetrating sorrow. And I want to go home.

March 20th, 2006

It is my mother's birthday. A day I am so lucky for because it is the day my mother was born. I am tired though and I can not tell the meaning of all of this. Today I helped a woman and man clean up their "home" and this home was a pile of wood and brick and memories and

keepsakes that were destroyed by water - water everywhere where there is life and death.

And as this girl and I stand in the middle of a debris filled street a k-9 police force "rescue team" walks by and this yellow Labrador with its tung hanging from its mouth runs into a house to smell for death but we can all smell it. Yes we all smell the stench of this disaster (man made) and veterans against war preach their sorrows and the black people of the lower ninth ward tell me about dead women found drowned in their beds,

with their delicate eyes closed and sleeping and green and my friends complain about their sun burns and dry noses and neurotic volunteers and they complain about feeling useless and we're all useless. Yes. There is no use for us now, this devastated city has a broken levee and a broken church and a broken people who can no longer cry when they pick up their child's water damaged baby shoes and their warped ruined photographs and their broken broken doors. Yes. We are of no use because these people needed something before and needed something different, not money and not rebuilt cities and not 19 year old volunteers telling them about free meals and rainbow centers. They needed a fair life and no they did not have it and no no one is listening and no the brewing clouds will not rise tonight and no that smell will not go away and will not disappear.

And what if that dog was sniffing for my mother? What if she was found with jaw clamped shut and salty tears washed away and what if my mom was found by a dog and a police officer with a hard hat and a face mask. It is my mother's birthday. ♣

the picture frames

and insurance receipts

and wheel chairs

that I place in an orange wheel barrel and put along the cracked uprooted pavement of "city" streets and this middle school still holds them and still teaches them and still speaks, but they do not sit in classroom desks and they do not come up to the chalkboard any longer

„

New Orleans

• Photos by Ewen Wright •



• Photo by Theresa Anderson •



WE WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND THANKS to several people and organizations who made this project possible. Krithi Rao, Alfred Planco, and Rob Petito are the principle organizers of the trip. Thank you to Community Council and the Hampshire community for generously supporting us. The editors of this publication would also like to specifically thank the Office of the President, Student Affairs, the Office of Student Development and Community Leadership, Dakin House Office, and the many other groups of students, staff, and administrators on campus who donated the

time and money that made our trip possible. We also want to extend thanks to Atkins Farms for the donation of food. We extend our apologies to these groups for leaving them out of the first edition.

Thank you Common Ground for hosting us and teaching us about community. Home Depot donated \$3000 to Common Ground through our organization. Thank you to Phil Olsen from UMass Amherst's efollett store for a generous donation of notebooks so we could write our travel logs. Thank you to the amazing residents of New Orleans for opening their hearts to us.



T

TONIGHT, a harvest moon is rising over this ghost town

tonight, there is nothing to say

we have reached the epicenter
by airplane
bus
and bikes

and tomorrow it will be light enough to peer in through
the windows of all the
flooded houses.

It is too scary to look at in the dark
I don't know what monsters are waiting for me,
i am five years old again.
and i am scared

This morning

we dug up twenty years of johnny and sandra's life.
you don't realize how much stuff is in your house
until you are piling it all up onto the curb.

Random stuff too...

Racecars,
trophies,
placemats,
nails

even the walls were in the street by the time we
finished gutting.

i think gutting is the right word for this
we left nothing for the belly.

this is familiar to me
sometime, four years ago
this was me
navigating the thick layers of dust
that settled in my room
after the world trade center fell.

I'm wearing the same boots that I dusted off
for months
and I'm gonna dust them off again

I remember the ghosts flying overhead at night
and how cold it got when
everything went into focus
you could feel their flight
hear them floating slowly overhead

i feel that here

harvest moon,
hanging over this ghost town,
it's a long road to rebuild

-Sairuh Lacoff